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Teacher Educator Engagement in an Online Environment

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Abstract: In this conceptual paper, we draw upon Pittaway's (2012) Engagement Framework, using it as a lens through which to examine the personal, professional, academic, intellectual and social dimensions of teacher educators' engagement within an online teaching environment. We reflect on findings from our pilot study (Downing & Dymont, 2013) and draw on key literatures in the fields of higher education, teacher education and online teaching to explore the various dimensions of the Engagement Framework, particularly as they relate to teacher educators' engagement. We offer recommendations for teacher educators to consider as they contemplate the move to online preparation of pre-service teachers. Our paper concludes with the recognition that for teacher educators to feel engaged in the online learning environment, they must be confident that it offers an engaging and effective form of learning for pre-service teachers. This paper will help teacher educators to better understand how to engage with the growing phenomenon of online preparation of pre-service teachers.

Introduction

The global expansion of online education continues unabated. A comparison between 2009 and 2010 commencing student enrolments in universities in Australia reflects a 5.4% increase for on-campus study and 25.7% increase for external or multi-mode study (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Between 2005 and 2011 the online education industry in Australia has experienced an annual growth of 22.4%, with estimated revenue of over \$4 billion dollars (IBSWorld, 2011). Globally, the statistics reflect a similar scenario with approximately 33% of all higher education students in the USA in 2007 enrolled in at least one online course (Allen & Seaman, 2008). In the United Kingdom, a recent review of the current provision of online education providers reveals that 77% of universities are strategically planning for their online education offerings with 87% of those universities planning to increase their online offerings in the next five years (HEFCE, 2011). As a result, the adoption of online teaching and learning in the higher education sector is now found across a wide range of disciplines and program levels, and a growing body of literature explores the advantages and disadvantages of the move to online delivery.

Benefits of online education for both students and educational institutions are well documented across a range of higher education discipline areas. Online education increases accessibility for non-traditional students who are combining work with study (Chau, 2010; Paulus et al., 2010) and students who live in remote or regional areas (Dell, Hobbs, & Miller, 2008; Robina & Anderson, 2010). In addition, online learning can also offer a more student-centred environment (Barker, 2003; Pederson & Liu, 2003; Salmon, 2003), facilitate

increased student engagement (Anderson, 2008; Herrington & Herrington, 2006) and develop students' abilities in a technology driven workplace (Bonk, 2009; Chau, 2010).

Research also points to the significant challenges that present in this new world of online education. Many studies reflect staff concerns about significantly increased workloads (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Gannon Cook, Ley, Crawford, & Warner, 2009), and it is significant that many academics would not recommend this mode of teaching to others (Ward Ulmer, Watson, & Derby, 2007). Additionally, many academics report a strong sense of missing the face-to-face contact with students and perceive a struggle to maintain student engagement (McQuiggan, 2007). In addition to academics' reservations, it appears that a large proportion of potential employers do not consider online education as a credible process (Gayton, 2009; Huss, 2007), prompting questions about the perceived suitability of graduates prepared online.

The online learning environment can be challenging for students as well, with studies revealing feelings of isolation and lack of support (technical, academic and/or social) in the teaching and learning environment (see, for example: Heirdsfield, Davis, Lennox, Walker, & Zhang, 2007; Murdock & Williams, 2010; Rovai & Downey, 2010). Negative experiences contribute to the lower retention rate in the online environment (Tyler-Smith, 2006) and raise doubts about the efficacy and suitability of this mode of education (Adams & DeFleur, 2005).

Despite an emerging body of literature, many aspects of online teacher education remain unexplored. In particular, there is scant literature on the experiences and beliefs of education faculty staff on their own readiness and preparation for online teaching, as well as their beliefs in relation to the appropriateness of preparing pre-service teachers through online modes of education (Georgina & Olson, 2008; Tao & Yeh, 2008; Wray, Lowenthal, Bates, & Stevens, 2008). This paper builds on an exploratory research study conducted one year after a major roll-out of fully online pre-service teaching degrees in a faculty of education in a mid-sized university in Australia (Downing & Dymont, 2013). A notable finding from the exploratory study was the significant tension that the technical and pedagogical change created, given the teacher educators' beliefs about the nature of their discipline and their understandings of good practice. This finding suggests that concurrent with the need to provide teacher educators with ongoing support and professional development opportunities when transitioning to online teaching there is also a need for more focussed research on the nature and quality of teacher engagement in online environments, in order to respond appropriately to the challenges it creates.

Given the inevitability of ongoing technological developments, we suggest that teacher educators will benefit from appropriate frameworks to support their critical review of factors that influence their pedagogical assumptions and practices. It is important to ensure that new technologies alone do not exert undue influence over course or unit design (Colpaert, 2006). A focus on design alone, however, is also insufficient (Colpaert, 2006; Mandernach, 2006) and evidence is emerging to justify the need for a more systematic study on the social, affective and conative factors (Lovat, 2010; Pittaway, 2012) that influence teacher educators' perceptions of their readiness to prepare pre-service teachers in an online environment.

In order to develop a more complex and multifaceted understanding of aspects of teacher engagement in online environments, this study draws on Pittaway's (2012) Engagement Framework which was introduced in an earlier volume of the *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* and which was used to explore aspects of student engagement. Recognising that every new analytical framework inevitably advances and constrains what can be known about the phenomenon under study, we acknowledge the problematic nature of understanding teaching staff's engagement in the online teaching environment. For example, teaching and learning are interconnected processes, and definitions of 'teacher presence'

(Kehrwald, 2008) and ‘interaction’ (Donnelly, 2009) in online environments are contested concepts. Furthermore, affective, cognitive and social factors combine in different ways in different individuals with the result that multifarious influences impact on both pre-service teachers’ and teacher educators’ understandings of good practice (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). The result is a highly complex and dynamic context. Nevertheless, it is our belief that Pittaway’s Engagement Framework provides a systematic approach to a preliminary examination of the dimensions of teacher educators’ engagement in online environments.

Pittaway’s Model of Engagement and Our Previous Research

Pittaway’s (2012) Engagement Framework can be used to understand, support and enhance the engagement of both students and staff. She conceptualizes five elements of engagement: intellectual, social, academic, professional, and personal (Figure 1). Pittaway discusses each element in terms of the ways students engage in teacher education programs and how staff can encourage student engagement through teaching and learning practices.

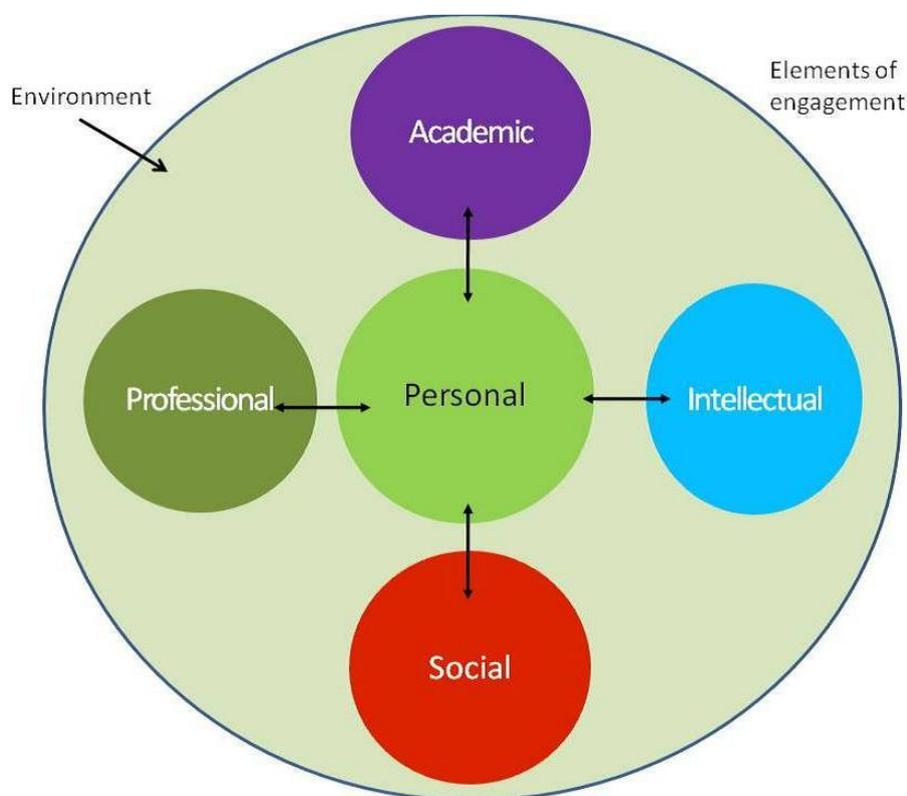


Figure 1. The Engagement Framework (Pittaway, 2012) (Reproduced with permission from the author).

Pittaway’s (2012) paper focusses primarily on *student* engagement in the early application of her framework. In this paper, we wish to move the focus to *staff* engagement in an online teaching environment. To this end, we apply Pittaway’s (2012) Framework to our earlier research project (Downing & Dymont, 2013), which explored teacher educators’ perceptions about their readiness to prepare pre-service teachers in an online environment. In this study, we examined the perceptions of 27 teacher educators who were teaching in a fully online teacher education course at a mid-size Australian university. We acknowledge the potentially confusing assortment of definitions surrounding online education and for the purposes of our earlier paper and for this paper have adopted Bolliger and Wasilik’s (2009)

definition of online education: “Online education is a process by which students and teachers communicate with one another and interact with course content via Internet-based learning technologies. A course is considered online if 80% or more of the content is delivered via the Internet” (p. 103).

In the main body of our paper, we draw on Pittaway’s (2012) five element framework to identify issues around teacher educators’ engagement in an online teaching environment. We begin each element with a quote/vignette from our previous research study (Downing & Dymont, 2013) that we believe captures the essence of each particular element. We then present and discuss the literature that identifies challenges and opportunities for creating staff engagement in regards to each element. Each section concludes with recommendations for facilitating and encouraging staff engagement in an online teaching environment within a Faculty of Education. These recommendations were generated from a critical reflection of the findings from our previous paper (Downing & Dymont, 2013) and our reading of the academic literature that explores staff engagement in an online teaching environment.

Before turning to an examination of each element as it relates to staff engagement, we wish to acknowledge the interrelationship among the elements of Pittaway’s Framework. For the purpose of this paper we have presented them as discreet elements – yet we acknowledge, as Pittaway (2012) did, the “distinctive, yet intersecting non-hierarchical elements” (p.38) that comprise the concept of engagement.

Discussion

Intellectual Engagement

I’m ok with teaching generalist pre-service teachers in my subject area online – in these circumstances, there are enough quality online resource to offer a good taster and ‘where to go next’ to engage them on a beginning professional journey. (Paul)
You can’t learn to be a teacher in an online environment. Teachers need to develop face to face skills; it is not just a matter of knowledge and completing assignments. They need to ‘become’ teachers in a more social and organic way and that means coming to class. (Anne)

Intellectual engagement is proposed by Pittaway (2012) as one of the key elements in her Engagement Framework. In her description of this element, she refers to the students’ ability to engage critically with the ideas, concepts, debates and ethical issues within the education discipline. The importance of being open minded, able to ask questions and defend positions is also an aspect of intellectual engagement (p. 43). Pittaway’s framework clearly points to the importance of engaging students intellectually as they are preparing to enter the teaching profession.

But what does it mean for teacher educators, to be intellectually engaged? As we interpret Pittaway’s model, we sense an opportunity to explore the overarching question as to whether teacher educators are convinced that the online classroom can be an effective forum for training pre-service teachers. Our own study (Downing & Dymont, 2013) revealed that there has to be a sense of ‘belief’ that pre-service teachers can be effectively prepared in an online environment if teacher educators are to be intellectually engaged in this mode of teaching. As our quotes above from the profiled teacher educators suggest, the issue is not without strong tensions and vastly differing points of view: some of our study respondents were fully supportive of the online development of pre-service teachers while others were firmly against it.

The literature also paints an unclear picture as to whether pre-service teachers can be effectively taught online, evidenced by the range of contrasting views on the suitability of the

online environment for preparing pre-service teachers for the demands of classroom practice (Chiero & Beare, 2010; Dell et al., 2008; Olson & Werhan, 2005). Two major concerns are identified: firstly the challenges that lie in modelling what is considered good (face to face) teaching strategies in an online environment, and secondly, being able to be explicit with students about pedagogical choices when teaching. Heirdsfield, Walker, Tambyah and Beutel's (2011) investigation of teacher perceptions of an online learning environment revealed that staff view face-to-face interactions and modelling provided in class as being "the most valuable learning experience for teacher education students" (p. 10). The importance of making pedagogy explicit in teacher education has been explored in the literature, with Loughran (2006) reiterating the importance of this so that "students of teaching might see into practice...in such a way as to gain a genuine appreciation of the skills, knowledge and abilities that shape practice" (p. 1). Unsurprisingly, there seems to be a common belief among teacher educators that pre-service teachers preparing for a face to face environment must have appropriate teaching behaviours modelled in a face to face environment. What may easily (and often spontaneously) be demonstrated in a face-to-face environment is harder to do in an online environment, and the challenge for teacher educators is to identify if and how this can be done. Critically, the task is not to replicate what is done in on-campus; instead it is necessary to find ways to achieve the same outcomes in different ways. This involves an investigation into alternative pedagogical strategies and supporting technologies which promote the desired student learning outcomes. There are certainly indicators that it is possible, with several studies suggesting a positive correlation between the length of time teaching online and confidence that online education is effective and appropriate (Fish & Gill, 2009; Robina & Anderson, 2010; Ward Ulmer et al., 2007).

We suggest that there is a positive relationship between the intellectual engagement of teacher educators and their belief that preparing pre-service teachers online is an effective mode of study. In practical terms, this means that if teacher educators consciously undertake intellectual engagement with the concept of online education, embracing the challenges and affordances of this mode, then it is more likely that they will feel able to provide an effective online learning environment for students. We suggest this is an often over-looked aspect as faculties move into the online provision of courses. Quite simply, the focus falls to mastering technology rather than engaging intellectually with the tensions that such technology (and its affordances) creates. Yet such engagement may be a critical pre-cursor to acceptance by academics, and perhaps particularly so in teacher education where practitioners hold deep seated beliefs of the pedagogical benefits they perceive in face-to-face interactions with students.

Drawing on our own study (Downing & Dymont, 2013) and Pittaway's (2012) Framework of Engagement, we offer a range of recommendations on strategies to increase the intellectual engagement of teacher educators working online. Firstly, in order to engage intellectually, academics need the time and resources to be conversant with the significant body of literature that has examined the affordances and limitations of online teaching and learning. The initial focus on comparative studies has passed (Bonk, 2009) as results have consistently indicated no significant difference to student outcomes (Reeves, 2005). More recent literature has focussed on the factors that are most likely to encourage student participation and effective learning (and, therefore, retention). The breadth of studies is significant, with some researchers focussing on the various forms of teachers' presence (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005; Northcote, 2010), while others have focussed more on the affordances of technology to increase student activity and improve learning potential (Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2010). Encouraging collegial discussions, inviting successful online teachers to share examples of best practice, providing adequate support

to increase uptake of multi-media technologies, for example, will all facilitate and encourage intellectual engagement with the online environment.

Social Engagement

I feel there is a void between me and the students in the online classroom. (Jane)

Every name and student number in the online classroom is a person with feelings, life pressures and aspirations. (Bill)

Pittaway (2012) notes the importance of social engagement in her Framework. As this relates to pre-service teachers in both the face-to-face and online environment, she highlights the value of students getting to know members of their classes, making friends with students in their classes and engaging in social activities inside and outside the classroom with their peers, tutors and lecturers. These social opportunities allow students to be exposed to a diversity of views, which in turn allows a deepening and extension of their own beliefs and perspectives. She also refers to the literature pointing to the positive relationship between the strength of social networks and success at university (Masters & Donnison, 2010, cited in Pittaway, 2012).

Based on our reading of the literature and in reflecting on our research study, we believe strongly that social engagement (with students, other teacher educators, and academic staff more broadly) is an important component of a successful transition into the online environment. Social engagement is readily fulfilled in a face to face teaching environment where students are physically present, where questions can be asked and where body language can be read (Mills, Yanes, & Casebeer, 2009; Rovai & Downey, 2010; Saltmarsh & Sutherland-Smith, 2010). These opportunities for social interactions between staff and students extend beyond tutorials and lectures, to the generally social nature of campus life. Such opportunities are sorely undermined when teaching online, with our own study and the literature identifying significantly increased feeling of isolation from colleagues when teaching in this mode (Downing & Dymont, 2013; Rovai & Downey, 2010). Practitioners report increased hours spent in isolation, working on their computer in their office, in order to respond to the demands of both teaching and marking online. As the percentages of online students increase, and teaching duties follow suit, faculty leaders need to be pro-active in creating compensatory events to ensure that staff still meet socially on campus. Regular morning teas, lunchtime walks or other community gatherings help to ensure that staff members still have opportunities to engage socially with their colleagues, and feel connected to campus life.

For social engagement levels to rise in the online environment, between students and between students and the teacher, the first priority is to recognise the value of such engagement. This cannot always be assumed; many academics may feel that their role does not extend to this element (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010). Yet the research clearly indicates that both students and staff report greater satisfaction in the online environment when a strong social presence exists (Lehman & Conceicao, 2010). The second aspect to recognise is that building social engagement may involve a level of orchestration that is not normally required on campus, and as such teaching staff may need guidance in the kind of strategies that will result in the same feeling of 'belongingness' that comes more naturally for on-campus students. Few would argue that on-campus students and staff appreciate opportunities for meaningful social interactions and relationships (Gysbers, Johnston, Hancock, & Denyer, 2011). In the online environment, increased social engagement for both teachers and students can be facilitated through the use of synchronous applications, using tools such as web-conferences, chat rooms and other social media options (McLoughlin, 2011; Salmon, 2003).

The immediacy of the interaction and the affordability of such applications to facilitate a higher quality of dialogue (Duncan, Kenworthy, & McNamara, 2012), strengthens social bonds between students and teachers, and contributes to a greater sense of ‘belonging’ in the online community (Im & Lee, 2003-2004). Social media applications provide a (cyber) space where teaching staff and students can get to know each other better, discuss relevant issues in a relaxed way and share ideas and items such as photos, videos and other multi-media files.

We suggest that increased social engagement will improve staff satisfaction with teaching online and recommend that the pedagogical approach includes opportunities for teacher educators and pre-service teachers to interact informally, such as personal introductions in the discussion boards, opportunities to share photos, common interests or contexts, and other similar strategies to help create bonds in the online environment. Faculty should consider investment and professional development in a range of synchronous communication tools for teaching staff and students, recognising the value they have in building social capital and a sense of community.

Academic

Online teaching requires a rethinking of how teaching is done. Sticking the face to face into an online forum without considering the methodology is flawed. However, this is often the solution for many. (Nahid)

Be a good (and I mean GOOD) teacher before you approach the online environment. Get good at teaching in a higher education setting in generally and then learn how to apply this goodness to an online environment. (Christine)

Personal and individual support by the IT staff were critical – they do a great job in ‘just in time learning’ and a very understanding of my timeframes. My confidence increased exponentially. (Frank)

The importance of student academic engagement has been noted in the Engagement Framework (Pittaway, 2012). In this component of her framework, Pittaway highlights the various “skills and attributes” (p. 43) that students must bring to and develop during their teacher education studies. Skills such as note-taking, reading, listening, problem solving, computer literacy and information management, for example, are essential for successful in a university setting. The importance of students taking “active control” of their learning “by planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning” is also an aspect of academic engagement (Scevak & Cantwell, 2007, cited in Pittaway, 2012, p. 43).

While Pittaway notes the importance of staff providing opportunities for students (in both face to face and online modes) to develop academic skills and attributes, her framework can also be used by teacher educators to identify ways to increase their own academic engagement. Academics need to take active control of their own learning and teaching by planning, monitoring and evaluating their academic practices and professional development. With the rapid and unswerving growth in online education most, if not all, academics in higher education institutions will be either designing, developing or delivering their teaching online in the near future. The prospect of a shift towards online teaching can be exciting, daunting or even terrifying for academics. The initial online approach that consisted of ‘books on screens’ has long passed and today’s students demand (and deserve) an engaging, effective and high quality learning environment for their studies (Heirdsfield et al., 2011; Salmon, 2003). For academic staff, however, there are justified concerns about significantly increased workload due to the additional time required to master the technology, create course materials and facilitate student interactions. These factors can severely undermine

teachers' academic engagement (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; McQuiggan, 2007; Paulus et al., 2010).

For teaching staff to engage academically with the online learning and teaching environment there needs to be a strong support system to facilitate that engagement. Our own study and the published literature suggest that academics are willing to try to embrace this new form of teaching provided they are supported in developing the habits such as monitoring and evaluating their professional development in the area of online teaching (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Downing & Dymont, 2013; Ward Ulmer et al., 2007). Teaching online can offer an opportunity to take a fresh look at pedagogical approaches, and as suggested by McQuiggan (2007, p. 5) "in rethinking their familiar ways of teaching...shift from a teacher-centred instruction to student-centred instruction".

A multi-pronged approach appears to be the most effective strategy to support the academic engagement of teaching staff. Typically, this might include campus-wide workshops, online sandpits, where staff can safely experiment with the software, training modules, and other opportunities to participate in professional development. Within such approaches, a critical component appears to be recognition of the subjectivity of pedagogy and the importance of acknowledging individual teacher identity (Saltmarsh & Sutherland-Smith, 2010). This reinforces the value of one-on-one support for teaching staff as a mechanism to engage them academically with the transition to online teaching. As highlighted by Watson (2007, p. 510), individual attention allows teaching staff to put their own 'spin' on things in order to "be the teaching self in which one feels natural". Research has pointed specifically to the concerns academics may have about teaching online and having their teaching approaches more 'visible' and, therefore, open to scrutiny from peers or senior faculty members (Marek, 2009; McQuiggan, 2007). As Saltmarsh and Sunderland-Smith (2010, p.19) note in their discussion of the subjectivity of teaching: "The kind of teaching subject that one is – which in this case involves the way one structures and organises learning as a stimulating activity – is compared and contrasted with the way that (academic) others are". Given the uniqueness of each teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning, and subsequent pedagogical approach to the group of learners, whether face to face or online, the value of an individualised approach to professional development is quite clear.

In order to increase academic engagement for teacher educators working in an online environment, therefore, it is recommended that multiple options for professional development are offered, including access to academic resources such as relevant journals that profile best practice. Critically, the provision of individual 'at-elbow' support will help academics to feel that they can retain and communicate their own teacher identity in an online teaching space. The task is not to develop all staff to be equal in how they teach online; rather it is to facilitate the academic's engagement in how they can teach in a way that feels authentic to their values and beliefs about pre-service teacher development.

Professional

Online teaching certainly challenges the vision I hold of myself as an educator who supports the development of pre-service teachers. I have to redefine myself, my role and be willing to assume new responsibilities. (Daniel)

I think we need to keep the profession abreast of these changes – this means letting our supervising teachers know about how pre-service teachers can be prepared.

(Claire)

Professional engagement is one of the key dimensions of Pittaway's (2012) Engagement Framework. Seen from the perspective of the pre-service teacher, this element

most obviously relates to the opportunities that present through the Professional Experience/Practicum where connections are made with teachers, principals, parents and other members of the school and broader professional educational community. Pittaway also points to the importance of ongoing professional engagement, which includes joining professional associations, attending conferences and workshops and becoming a contributing member of the teaching profession. This is indeed worthy advice for all pre-service teachers.

Equally, we believe, is the importance for teacher educators to be professionally engaged. Irrespective of teaching forum (i.e., face to face or online), the kinds of engagement Pittaway suggests for students are also expected of teacher educators. It is a professional duty to contribute to the broader educational community by attending conferences, offering seminars, and being an active member of professional organizations.

In the context of this paper, we are interested in the issue of professional engagement of teacher educators who are teaching in an online environment. In particular, we look to the concept of professional identity and the ways in which teacher educators can develop and strengthen their own engagement with the profession of teaching. Kozminsky (2011, p. 13) suggests that a teacher's professional identity presents an answer to the question "who am I, or what am I as a professional?" She suggests that various factors contribute to the construction of professional identity, including the context of teaching, the experiences as a teacher, and the personal biography. Critically, Kozminsky suggests that there are four tensions that teachers face when confronted with changes in educational policy and practice: (1) Knowing versus continuing to learn, (2) educating versus teaching a content area, (3) taking part in a democratic-participatory discourse versus hierarchical-managerial discourse and (4) a culture of control versus a culture of empowerment (p.12). Although Kozminsky is not referring specifically to online education in her paper, few would argue that such tensions exist in the context of faculties moving into the online mode of delivery. Rather than only seeing the negative aspect of such tension, Kozminsky invites educators to embrace the concept of 'inquiry dialogue' that "scrutinizes the complexity inherent in teaching and facilitates the creation of 'profession identity in motion' – an identity that is aware of its complexities and continues to grow" (p. 13). As other research has shown (Day, Ellieo & Kington, 2005; Robinson & McMillan, 2006), policy makers and implementers need to ensure that any proposed educational changes take into account the potential effect on professional identity and allow democratic dialogue with and between those affected. This is not to say that debate should focus on whether or not online learning is appropriate, as we believe that the statistics tell the story: online education is here to stay (Bonk, 2009). The discussions that should be encouraged are those that serve to develop and share examples of best practices and engage and motivate others to follow suit.

We believe therefore, that there are a range of strategies that faculty can consider in order to encourage the professional engagement of academic staff teaching online. Most importantly, perhaps, is the encouragement of a professional dialogue of inquiry into the ramifications of teaching online. Such dialogue may involve stakeholders such as partner schools, departments and other universities, with the aim to keep abreast of the emergent models for pre-service teacher education. Similarly, teacher educators need accessible options to keep abreast of technological developments that can enhance the student experience and the effectiveness of the online environment. Ideally, such professional development should encompass the use of the technology itself, such as participation in web-conferences, online forums and groups, and other synchronous and asynchronous methods of professional dialogue.

Personal

Be ready to give it double the effort of face to face. Be ready to sign on first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. Be accessible, be there – always, all the time. (Wendy)

One has to teach with more passion and commitment than face to face. (Tim)

It still doesn't give me the same satisfaction as teaching face to face. (Claire)

Pittaway (2012) devotes the largest amount of her paper to an exploration of personal engagement element of her Engagement Framework. She draws on a rich body of literature to explore the theoretical underpinnings of this element, arguing that students have intentions, expectations, and assumptions about their pre-service teacher course and they also have responsibilities associated with their decisions.

Similar to the other elements of the framework, Pittaway highlights the ways and means that teacher educators can provide opportunities for students to be personally engaged. She urges course designers, developers and the teaching staff to bring these issues to the forefront of the teaching experience through effective curriculum design, active questioning, explicit teaching and appropriate assessment task creation. There is an abundance of research that points to a positive correlation between high levels of personal engagement of students, satisfaction levels and success in higher education (Anderson, 2008).

But what does it mean for a teacher educator to be personally engaged in an online environment? It could be argued that teacher educators also have intentions, expectations and assumptions about their university jobs – and that these have been brought into question by the move to online delivery. Is online teaching what teacher-educators 'signed up for' when they chose a career in teacher preparation? It seems reasonable to assume that for similarly to students, those with high levels of personal engagement will be more satisfied and experience more success in their role as an academic. Yet our reading of the literature suggests a downward spiral for the levels of personal engagement within academia, with reports of reduced levels of organisational commitment (Mark & Smith, 2012), higher levels of burnout (Fredman & Doughney, 2011), and increased intention to leave the profession (Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011). Multiple reasons are offered, ranging from managerial styles, increased student to teacher ratios, and growing demands for research outputs and successful grant applications.

As universities increase their online offerings, more academics face the prospect of teaching in this new mode. With the large majority of academics believing that the traditional lecture is still the most effective means to producing student learning outcomes (Binn & Munro, 2008), it requires a high degree of personal commitment and motivation to pursue this new form of teaching (Mills et al., 2009). Adding to the doubts about the efficacy of online learning, our own study and the published literature points to the significant time required to both master and maintain an effective online learning environment (Salmon, 2003). Yet the potential benefits for both students and teachers are undisputed, with a string of comparative studies reflecting quality outcomes for students (Rovai & Downey, 2010) and a growing number of academics who have experienced both satisfaction and success in the online environment (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Fish & Gill, 2009; Ward Ulmer et al., 2007). It is the success stories that can increase the personal engagement of teaching peers, along with a supportive working environment that recognises and responds to the demands of the online learning environment. In particular, teaching online offers opportunities for a deeper level of dialogue with and between students (Salmon, 2003), close connection with individual students through personalised communication such as emails, phone calls and Skypes (Krause, 2005) and the satisfaction that comes with affording an opportunity to participate in

an educational experience that might otherwise be impossible, due to isolation or other life and work commitments (Bonk, 2009).

To increase levels of personal engagement for teacher educators working in an online environment, the first step is to acknowledge the fears and concern of faculty, and encourage those feelings to be made explicit in a safe environment. Secondly, academics need be made aware that the rewards of teaching online may well look and feel different to the face to face environment. The pedagogical approach will be different, and the experience for both the student and the teacher will contrast the on-campus experience, but benefits can be significant and meaningful nonetheless. And finally, in order to encourage the personal engagement of academics in the online environment, support and encouragement to contribute the scholarship of teaching and learning and in particular, to the effective preparation of the teachers of the future classroom, is paramount.

Conclusion

The evidence is unequivocal that economic pressures and new models of education are bringing unprecedented competition to the traditional models of higher education. This competition has seen universities as a whole and academics within faculties integrate new and compelling technologies for teaching and learning. Whilst the current technologies include online delivery through Learning Management Systems, new technologies lie in the foreseeable horizon: mobile applications, cloud computing and game based learning will increasingly become integrated within the tertiary sector.

In light of this competitive and ever changing context, this paper is timely in its exploration of the issue of engagement for academics. Pittaway's framework has been a useful lens for exploring the five dimensions of engagement as they relate to teacher educators working in an online environment. Whilst the majority of literature to date has explored the intersection of engagement and the online learning environment for students, this paper has made a significant contribution in its attempt to explore the factors relevant to teacher educators.

The recommendations offered in this paper should be of interest to academic staff and administrators in faculties of education and beyond, as a basis for further conversations about the nature and implications of different dimensions of teachers' engagement in online learning environments. Whilst some of the recommendations are reasonably straightforward and pragmatic in their enactment (e.g., digital media literacy professional development opportunities), others are more philosophical in their nature and will require a commitment from teacher educators to deliberate and ponder their roles and responsibilities as academics in an ever changing educational landscape. These recommendations are summarized in the table below.

Element	Strategies to support increased engagement
Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share examples of best online practice and encourage collegial discussion and debate on ways to prepare pre-service teachers online. • Use creative multi-media technologies to allow opportunities for the modelling face-to-face teaching strategies. • Engage in collegial discussions with students; encourage their feedback and identify ways to improve the online learning environment. • Be explicit with pre-service teachers about the challenges and opportunities that present through online teacher preparation.
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for teacher educators and pre-service teachers to share background details (e.g., informal introductions in the online environment, photos and other personal information). • Encourage the inclusion of synchronous communication tools in the online environment in order to facilitate more spontaneous, relaxed interaction between students and teachers; • Plan regular social events that prompt staff members to leave their office and engage with peers; and, • Encourage online students who live near campus to visit teaching staff during semester.
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide multiple options for professional development, including access to academic resources such as relevant journals that profile best practice. • Ensure that individual ‘at-elbow’ support is readily available for teaching staff. • Through the professional development opportunities, ensure that academics have the skills to retain and communicate their own teacher identity in an online teaching space. • Allow significant time for staff to devote to developing the pedagogical and technical skills and knowledge needed to teach online.
Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage a professional dialogue of inquiry into the ramifications of teaching online. • Stakeholders, such as partner schools and government departments, must be kept abreast of the emergent models for pre-service teacher preparation. • Establish and develop connections to the broader professional educational community, particularly those with a focus on the affordances of online education. • Maximise the opportunities that present in the online environment to involve the professional community with pre-service teachers through applications such as web-

	conferences
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not dismiss the fears and concerns of faculty. Encourage those feelings to be made explicit in a safe environment and identify ways to address them. • Recognise that the rewards of teaching online may look and feel different to the face-to-face equivalent, but exist none-the-less. • Encourage academics to contribute actively to the scholarship of teaching and learning in the online environment, celebrating its role in preparing the teachers of the future classroom.

Table 1: Summary of Strategies to Support Increased Engagement for Teacher Educators Working in an Online Environment

This conceptual paper sets the stage for a more ambitious investigation into teacher educator engagement in an online environment. Future research should solicit the voices of teacher educators to better understand the issue of staff engagement and to determine if and how the recommendations across the five elements can be further developed to support teachers’ transition to an online mode of delivery. The reciprocal relationship between staff and student engagement in an online forum is another area that we feel deserves attention. It would also be of interest to explore if and how whole university approaches to supporting the transition to online delivery can address some of the issues related to academic engagement. Future research is clearly warranted in such an exciting, complex and ever changing environment in tertiary education.

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